# FQIAC

# Foreign Qualifications Information & Assessment Centre

A Business Plan

92--06331/

# Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre

## A Business Plan

### Introduction

A provincial government task force has identified a major problem facing Alberta workers trained in other countries: there is no central government department or agency in Canada able to assess all foreign academic credentials and determine their Alberta equivalencies. Upon arrival in Alberta, many newcomers find that the very credentials which earned them immigration points are not recognized as equivalent to Alberta standards. As a result, many foreign-trained Albertans are unable to put their skills to work for themselves and our economy.

The lack of an assessment service also poses difficulties for employers, regulatory bodies, and professional associations; without accurate, reliable information, they often are unable to easily evaluate applicants trained abroad. It is a losing situation for everyone.

We must find a better way of integrating foreign-trained workers into our economy, especially since Alberta can expect to receive 25,000 immigrants a year between now and 1995. Fortunately, there is a way.

The Alberta government has developed a business plan for establishing a Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre. Our plan calls for the Centre to:

- authenticate foreign academic credentials and compare them to Alberta high school, trade, college and university programs;
- issue Certificates of Equivalency comparing foreign credentials to Alberta academic standards;
- provide an information and referral service about qualifications and accreditation procedures for all trades and professions in Alberta, along with information about educational upgrading and financial support programs in the province.

The Centre would in no way infringe upon the autonomy and decision-making authority of regulatory bodies and professional associations. The Centre would benefit workers in a wide array of trades, professions and other occupations, including, for example, engineers, architects, plumbers and electricians.

The Centre would cost approximately $325,000 in its first year and $495,000 a year to operate once it was fully functional. We propose that the cost be shared by the government, community, and private sector.

Our plan allows for the involvement of all stakeholders and will enable Albertans to meet an urgent and growing need at a cost we can afford. To find out how you can become involved in this innovative partnership, read on.

## Background

In 1988 Elaine McCoy established the Task Force on the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications. Its mandate was to examine concerns that Albertans were often unable to obtain proper recognition of academic credentials obtained in other countries.

The Task Force consulted with more than 200 individuals and about 100 professional associations, regulatory agencies, immigrant-serving agencies and ethnic organizations. It concluded that foreign-trained Albertans had valid concerns about the recognition of their qualifications.

The Task Force recommended that the Alberta government establish a centre to assess foreign qualifications. It also recommended that the centre provide an information and referral service regarding qualifications and application procedures for trades and professions in Alberta.

In 1992 the Task Force submitted its report to Labour Minister Elaine McCoy, Steve West, Minister Responsible for the Professions and Occupations Bureau, and Dianne Mirosh, Chair of the Council on Professions and Occupations. They have endorsed the recommendations and are committed to establishing a centre in partnership with other stakeholders. To date, they have obtained financial support for the start-up phase from several of their government colleagues:

- Doug Main, Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism, and Steve Zarusky, Chair of the Multiculturalism Commission, have agreed to provide a grant of $250,000;
- Norm Weiss, Minister Responsible for Career Development and Employment, will provide $110,000 from his department.

Starting in April 1993, the Professions and Occupations Bureau will provide $160,000 per year.

The next step is to approach individuals and organizations outside government for their assistance and support. Toward that end, Ms. McCoy, Dr. West and Ms. Mirosh have developed the following business plan. Its goal is to extend the innovative partnership which has developed within government to the outside community.

## The Rationale

# Why we are taking a partnership approach

A Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre will succeed only if it has the support and commitment of all stakeholders. Our business plan is based on the principle that all beneficiaries should have the opportunity to participate in the Centre's creation and operation. Thus we ensure the Centre's viability and relevance to the people it is meant to serve.

### The stakeholders

Many Albertans and organizations will benefit from Centre services. The key stakeholders are:

- Newcomers to Alberta. The Centre will help them obtain proper recognition of their education and training.
- Employers. The Centre will help them to assess the academic credentials of prospective employees. Employers facing shortages of skilled labour should find the Centre particularly useful.
- Regulatory agencies and professional associations. The Centre will help them fulfill their mandate of maintaining high standards of practice and assist them in making admission decisions.
- Immigrant serving organizations. The Centre will help them fulfill their mission of assisting newcomers to Alberta.
- Albertans in general. The Centre will be good for our economy because it will help newcomers become fully productive members of the labour force. The Centre will also help ensure that our education and training dollars are spent on Albertans who truly need them. We cannot afford the inefficiency of forcing adequately trained people to enter our post-secondary system. The education and training newcomers bring with them is a valuable resource for which Albertans have not had to pay.

### Stakeholder responsibilities

In developing our business plan, we have allocated responsibilities to the stakeholders who we believe can most effectively carry them out. Since the Centre will benefit all Albertans directly or indirectly, the government will play a major and leading role in its establishment.

## The Details

# How we are sharing responsibility

### What the Alberta government will do — develop and maintain standards

The Professions and Occupations Bureau will establish an in-house Standards and Information Development Unit.

Using established principles of comparative education, the Unit will evaluate academic credentials from around the world and determine equivalency standards for Alberta. The Unit will work with representatives from regulated professions, trades and secondary and post-secondary institutions in setting and updating standards. It will also build on the work of the Division *des Equivalences* in Quebec, which has already compiled a large data bank on foreign credentials.

The Unit will also develop procedures for authenticating foreign academic credentials. Additionally, it will collect information about how to qualify and apply for various trades and professions and government educational and income support programs.

The Unit will feed all of its standards and occupational information into a computerized data bank for use by the Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre.

The Unit will cost approximately $360,000 to establish. Start-up funds will be provided by the Alberta Multiculturalism Commission and Alberta Career Development and Employment. The Unit's ongoing operational costs are estimated at $160,000 a year and will be funded from existing resources within the Professions and Occupations Bureau.

### What other stakeholders can do — deliver, promote and support the service

We believe a Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre will be more effective and credible if it is a community-based organization, designed and controlled by the stakeholders it is meant to serve.

Therefore the Alberta government will introduce legislation this fall to establish a non-profit corporation to operate the Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre.

Under our proposed legislation, the corporation would be run by a 15-member volunteer board of directors. The Minister Responsible for the Professions and Occupations Bureau would appoint a minority of directors; non-government groups would appoint the majority.

The board would include representatives from all stakeholder groups: employers, the trades, educational institutions, professional associations, immigrant serving organizations, ethnocultural groups, and individuals with foreign credentials. The board would hire a Chief Executive Officer to handle daily operations.

The board would be responsible for ensuring the Centre provides the following three services:

- Authenticate and evaluate foreign academic credentials using the procedures and standards developed by the Alberta government's Standards and Information Development Unit;
- Issue Certificates of Equivalency comparing foreign academic credentials to Alberta ones. Clients who disagree with assessments would be able to appeal to the Standards and Information Development Unit;
- provide an information and referral service about qualifications and accreditation procedures for all trades and professions in Alberta, along with information about educational upgrading and financial support programs in the province.

The board would be responsible for promoting and marketing Centre services and maintaining good relationships with stakeholder groups. It would have freedom to develop new products and services to meet the evolving needs of clients.

The Centre would cost about $495,000 a year to operate when it is fully operational. The Alberta government would provide services such as office space, telephone, utilities, and administrative support. Otherwise, the Centre would be self-supporting, its activities financed through a combination of user fees and tax deductible contributions from individuals and organizations. The board would have complete discretion in deciding what, if any, fees to charge.

To assist fund-raising, the government will introduce legislation this fall establishing the Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Foundation, to be run by the same board of directors. The Foundation will provide an investment vehicle for stakeholders to participate in the life of the Centre and possibly generate an endowment fund large enough to support the Centre through interest income.

The success of the Centre depends on the amount of support and commitment it receives from the individuals and organizations who will benefit from its services. Stakeholders must have complete confidence in the quality, accuracy, speed and fairness of the Centre's work.

To ensure a high level of support, we will involve stakeholders in the very beginning stages of the Centre. We will give interested Albertans a chance to provide input and suggestions on our business plan and proposed legislation. Toward that end, we will form a steering committee of stakeholder representatives to help us lay the groundwork for the Centre. The committee will seek input on our business plan and proposed legislation and generally assist us in generating understanding and support for the Centre.

## Projected Timelines

### Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre

We are assuming the board of Directors will want to move quickly. The winter and spring timelines are tentative, however, and may be adjusted by the Board in keeping with its own plans and fund-raising initiatives.

| | |
|---|---|
| **June 1992** | Elaine McCoy, Diane Mirosh and Steve West assemble a steering committee of stakeholder representatives to seek public input and support for Centre proposal |
| **Fall 1992** | Government introduces legislation establishing the Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre and its accompanying fund-raising foundation |
| | Board of directors is appointed by Minister Responsible for Professions and Occupations Bureau and non-government stakeholder groups |
| **Winter 1993** | Board hires CEO |
| | CEO hires centre staff and staff undergoes training |
| **Spring 1993** | Opening of Centre in Edmonton |

### Standards and Information Development Unit

| | |
|---|---|
| **June 1992 to February 1993** | The Professions and Occupations Bureau hires a project coordinator to develop the Unit |
| | Unit purchases Quebec data and develops a computer system for Alberta |
| | Unit translates Quebec data into English |
| | Unit forms equivalency advisory committees to help develop Alberta standards |
| **February 1993** | Unit turns system over to Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre |
| **April 1, 1993** | The Standards and Information Development Unit is officially established to provide ongoing services to the Centre |

## Projected Expenses and Revenues

# Standards and Information Development Unit

**Start-up Phase Costs and Revenue June 1992 — March 31, 1993**

**Expenses**

| | |
|---|---|
| Contract with project coordinator | $ 75,000 |
| Computer hardware | 30,000 |
| Software development | 100,000 |
| Purchase of Quebec data | 50,000 |
| Translation of Quebec data | 50,000 |
| Supplies | 30,000 |
| Travel | 15,000 |
| Advisory Committee costs | 10,000 |
| **Total Expenses** | **$ 360,000** |

**Revenue**

| | |
|---|---|
| Grant from Alberta Multiculturalism Commission | 250,000 |
| Funds from Career Development and Employment | 110,000 |
| **Total Revenue** | **$ 360,000** |

### Ongoing Operation

Once established, the Standards and Information Development Unit will be funded using existing resources of the Professions and Occupations Bureau. This ongoing contribution is valued at $160,000 per year and will commence on April 1, 1993.

# Foreign Qualifications Information and Assessment Centre

## Year One

In its first year, the Centre will provide service from its Edmonton office at an estimated cost of $325,000. This will pay the salaries of five staff, the cost of purchasing computer equipment and supplies, staff travel and travel and subsistence costs for the Board of Directors.

During the first year, the Centre is expected to serve at least 1,000 clients.

The Centre has the potential to generate revenues through fund-raising and user fees. For example, if the Board of Directors decided to charge a $200 fee for equivalency assessments, the Centre would generate $200,000 in revenues. That would leave a $125,000 fund-raising target.

In addition to these first year costs, start-up costs of about $65,000 will be required for expenses such as staff training and supplies. These monies will have to be raised during 1992 – 93.

**Projected First Year Operating Costs and Revenue**
**April 1, 1993 — March 31, 1994**

**Expenses**

| | |
|---|---|
| Staff salaries (5) | $ 225,000 |
| Board of Directors travel and subsistence costs | 20,000 |
| Staff travel | 30,000 |
| Supplies | 25,000 |
| EDP hardware | 25,000 |
| **Total Expenses** | **$ 325,000** |

**Revenue**

| | |
|---|---|
| Income from fees ($200 X 1,000 clients) | $ 200,000 |
| Community/corporate contribution | 125,000 |
| **Total Revenue** | **$ 325,000** |

Our client projections are based on current immigration quotas and the proportion of immigrants who arrive with foreign academic credentials. We have also assumed usage will increase from 1,000 in the first year as the service becomes better known. We have also looked at the Quebec experience in forming our projections. Quebec has operated a foreign equivalency service for 15 years.

## Year Two and Beyond

In calculating Year Two expenses, we have assumed that the Centre will open a satellite office in Calgary. However, the Board of Directors may decide a satellite office is unnecessary.

A Calgary service is expected to cost $215,000 in its first year. The money would cover the salary of four staff, computer purchase, travel and supplies. With a satellite in Calgary, the Centre's Edmonton costs would drop to $280,000. The total cost of both offices would be $495,000.

We expect at least 2,000 clients to use the Centre in Year Two.

Once again, the Board of Directors may generate revenues through user fees and contributions. For example, a user fee of $200 would generate revenue of $400,000, leaving a fund-raising target of $95,000.

### Projected Second year Operating Costs and Revenue
### April 1, 1994 — March 31, 1995

#### Expenses

**Edmonton Office Expenses**

| | |
|---|---|
| Staff salaries (5) | $ 225,000 |
| Board of Directors travel and subsistence costs | 20,000 |
| Staff travel | 10,000 |
| Supplies | 25,000 |
| **Total Edmonton Expenses** | **$ 280,000** |

**Calgary Office Expenses**

| | |
|---|---|
| Staff salaries (4) | $ 160,000 |
| EDP hardware | 20,000 |
| Staff travel | 10,000 |
| Supplies | 25,000 |
| **Total Calgary Expenses** | **$ 215,000** |
| **Total Edmonton and Calgary Expenses** | **$ 495,000** |

#### Revenue

| | |
|---|---|
| Income from fees — Edmonton ($200 X 1,000 clients) | $ 200,000 |
| — Calgary ($200 X 1,000 clients) | 200,000 |
| Community/corporate contribution | 95,000 |
| **Total Revenue** | **$ 495,000** |